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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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ELECTION 2020

Bloomberg seeks to rechannel TV sheen

After on-screen version fails to get onstage, campaign regroup

BY MICHAEL SCHERER, JOSH DAWSEY AND MICHAEL KRANISH

Just hours after his debate-stage drubbing, former New York mayor Mike Bloomberg reappeared Thursday in Utah with his teleprompter and billionaire swagger. A crowd of hundreds chanted his name as he read words that landed like precision-guided missiles.

"We all know that Trump is a bully. But I am a New Yorker. I know how to deal with bullies. I do it all the time," he said to cheers.

For anyone who had watched the Democratic debate the night before, the man onstage in Salt Lake City on Thursday was difficult to reconcile with the one who had shown up Wednesday. It's a problem his campaign is now grappling with, as it scrambles to regain momentum in the weeks before the make-or-break Super Tuesday primaries on March 3. The most expensive political campaign in American history has found itself at a crossroads, with two Mike Bloomsbergs running for president at the same time.

One is the tough, get-it-done, rich guy who stars in \$340 million worth of advertising, emotes in scripted speeches and is praised daily by his surrogate army as a master manager and Democratic's sole realistic hope to defeat President Trump.

SEE BLOOMBERG ON A8

A fluid field: Democrats brace for possible contested convention. A8



Roger Stone, President Trump's former adviser, leaves court after his sentencing Thursday. He was convicted on seven counts of lying to Congress and tampering with a witness about his efforts to learn about hacked Democratic emails related to Hillary Clinton.

Stone sentenced to 40 months in prison

BY RACHEL WEINER, MATT ZAPOTOSKY, TOM JACKMAN AND DEVLIN BARRETT

A federal judge on Thursday sentenced Roger Stone, President Trump's longtime friend and political adviser, to serve three years and four months in prison for impeding a congressional investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

The penalty from U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson comes after weeks of infighting over the politically charged case that threw the Justice Department into crisis, and it is likely

On Twitter, Trump hints at pardon for ally: judge issues a veiled rebuke

not to be the final word. Even before the sentencing hearing began, Trump seemed to suggest on Twitter that he might pardon Stone. With the proceedings ongoing, Trump questioned whether his ally was being treated fairly. Afterward, he attacked the jury in the case and said he would "love to see Roger exonerated."

In a lengthy speech before imposing the penalty, Jackson seemed to take aim at Trump, saying Stone "was not prosecuted for standing up for the president; he was prosecuted for covering up for the president." She also appeared to call out Attorney General William P. Barr, saying his intervention to reduce career prosecutors' sentencing recommendation was "unprecedented." But she said the politics surrounding the case had not influenced her decision.

"The truth still exists; the truth still matters," Jackson said, echoing prosecutors' closing arguments at trial in November. "Roger Stone's insis-

tence that it doesn't, his belligerence, his pride in his own lies are a threat to our most fundamental institutions, to the foundations of our democracy. If it goes unpunished, it will not be a victory for one party or another. Everyone loses."

She added, "The dismay and disgust at the defendant's belligerence should transcend party." Trump, meanwhile, weighed in from afar — again bucking Barr's public and private warnings to stop talking about Justice Department criminal cases. As the hearing was ongoing, the president, who is traveling on the West Coast, suggested in a

SEE STONE ON A4

Election warning fells spy chief

BRIEFER SAID RUSSIA PREFERS TRUMP

Perception of disloyalty leads to removal of DNI

BY ELLEN NAKASHIMA, SHANE HARRIS, JOSH DAWSEY AND ANNE GEARAN

A senior U.S. intelligence official told lawmakers last week that Russia wants to see President Trump reelected, viewing his administration as more favorable to the Kremlin's interests, according to people who were briefed on the comments.

After learning of that analysis, which was provided to House lawmakers in a classified hearing, Trump grew angry at his acting director of national intelligence, Joseph Maguire, in the Oval Office, seeing Maguire and his staff as disloyal for speaking to Congress about Russia's perceived preference. The intelligence official's analysis and Trump's furious response ruined Maguire's chances of becoming the permanent intelligence chief, according to people familiar with the matter who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter.

It was not clear what specific steps, if any, U.S. intelligence officials think Russia may have taken to help Trump, according to the individuals.

Trump announced on Wednesday that he was replacing Maguire with a vocal loyalist, Richard Grenell, who is the U.S. ambassador to Germany. The shake-up at

SEE INTELLIGENCE ON A6

How conservatives secured friendly Facebook policies

Insider influence, fear of backlash shaped company action on misinformation

BY CRAIG TIMBERG

Facebook created "Project P" — for propaganda — in the hectic weeks after the 2016 presidential election and quickly found dozens of pages that had peddled false news reports ahead of Donald Trump's surprise victory. Nearly all were based overseas, had financial motives and displayed a clear rightward bent.

In a world of perfect neutrality, which Facebook espouses as its goal, the political tilt of the pages shouldn't have mattered. But in a videoconference between Facebook's Washington office and its Silicon Valley headquarters in December 2016, the company's most senior Republican, Joel Kaplan, voiced concerns that would become familiar to those within the company.

"We can't remove all of it be-

cause it will disproportionately affect conservatives," said Kaplan, a former George W. Bush White House official and now the head of Facebook's Washington office, according to people familiar with the meeting who spoke on the condition of anonymity to protect professional relationships.

When another Facebook staff member pushed for the entire list to be taken down on the grounds that the accounts fueled the "fake news" that had rolled the election, Kaplan warned of the backlash from conservatives.

"They don't believe it to be fake news," he said, arguing for time to develop guidelines that could be defended to the company's critics, including on the right.

The debate over "Project P" which resulted in a few of the worst pages quickly being removed while most others remained on the platform, exemplified the political dynamics that have reigned within Facebook since Trump emerged as the Republican Party's presumptive nominee to the White House in 2016. A company led mainly by

SEE FACEBOOK ON A14

CAUGHT IN A CROSSWIND

A pivotal decision on coronavirus-infected Americans left U.S. officials at odds



Buses at Tokyo airport hold Americans who were quarantined on a cruise ship in Japan. The State Department chose to fly home 14 infected passengers over the objections of U.S. officials at odds.

BY LENA H. SUN, LENNY BERNSTEIN, SHIBANI MAHTANI AND JOEL ACHENRACH

In the wee hours of a rainy Monday, more than a dozen buses sat on the tarmac at Tokyo's Haneda Airport. Inside, 328 weary Americans wearing surgical masks and gloves waited anxiously to fly home after weeks in quarantine aboard the Diamond Princess, the luxury liner where the novel coronavirus had exploded into a shipwide epidemic.

But as the buses idled, U.S. officials wrestled with troubling news. New test results showed that 14 passengers were infected with the virus. The U.S. State Department had promised that no one with the infection would be allowed to board the planes.

A decision had to be made. Let them all fly? Or leave them behind in Japanese hospitals?

In Washington, where it was still Sunday afternoon, a fierce debate broke out: The State Department and a top Trump administration health official

SEE VIRUS ON A12

IN THE NEWS



MARKEP SCHREIBER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

German shooting Chancellor Angela Merkel decried the "poison" of racism as a gunman's attacks were tied to far-right extremism. A11

Maryland clash The governor hit Democrats on a crime bill and a sales-tax expansion. B1

THE NATION Loan-forgiveness criteria published in error by the U.S. Education Department triggered confusion among workers seeking relief. A2

The Department of Homeland Security said states can accept documents for Real ID applications electronically. A3

Mike Mulvaney, the acting White House chief of staff, told a private gathering in Britain that the United States "needs more immigrants" to keep its economy growing. A4

The United States joined several countries in accusing Russia of a major cyberattack in the Republic of Georgia and pledged to hold the Kremlin accountable. A6

THE WORLD Government authorities in India built a wall and spruced up the Taj Mahal ahead of President Trump's first presidential visit. A10

Pakistan is hoping that its steps to "eradicate" terrorism will keep it off a global blacklist this week. A24

THE ECONOMY Morgan Stanley is acquiring E-Trade in a \$13 billion deal, the biggest bank takeover since the 2008 crisis. A26

After the technological errors that roiled the Iowa caucuses, Nevada is rushing to get a new system in place. A18

China might purchase much less U.S. agricultural product this year than the \$40 billion promised by President Trump, a new USDA estimate suggested. A24

THE REGION The father of slain journalist Alison Parker filed an FTC complaint over YouTube's alleged

refusal to remove footage of his daughter's on-air killing in 2015. B1

Racist graffiti targeting black students was found in two academic buildings at Maryland's Salisbury University, the second such incident this school year. B1

A Marine captured the famous two-jima flag-raising on film. The original "in camera" color film hasn't been seen in 75 years. B1

Weeks after a University of Virginia visiting professor's visa decision was delayed for unclear reasons, the German teacher was told it had been granted. B4

INSIDE



WEEKEND D.C. buzz for 2020 Eight tastemakers in cocktails, theater and radio predict the trends that will sweep the city.

SPORTS Don't say 'repeat' Manager Dave Martinez sticks with Nats' mantra: Think Small, Work Hard and Have Fun. D1

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Intelligence warning about election leads to replacement of DNI with Grenell

INTELLIGENCE FROM A1

the top of the intelligence community is the latest move in a post-impeachment purge. Trump has instructed aides to identify and remove officials across the government who aren't defending his interests, and he wants them replaced with loyalists.

Maguire, a career official who is respected by the intelligence rank and file, was considered a leading candidate to be nominated to the post of DNI, White House aides had said. But Trump's opinion shifted last week when he heard from a Republican ally about the official's remarks.

The official, Shelby Pierson, said several times during the briefing that Russia had "developed a preference" for Trump, according to a U.S. official familiar with her comments. That conclusion was part of a broader discussion of election security that also touched on when the U.S. government should warn Democratic candidates if they are being targeted by foreign governments.

The New York Times first reported on the intelligence conclusion that Russia wants to help the president in 2020.

Trump erroneously believed that Pierson had given the assessment exclusively to Rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Calif.), the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, people familiar with the matter said. Trump also believed that the information would be helpful to Democrats if it were released publicly, the people said. Schiff was the lead impeachment manager, or prosecutor, during Trump's Senate trial on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

Trump learned about Pierson's remarks from Rep. Devin Nunes (Calif.), the committee's ranking Republican and a staunch Trump ally, said one person familiar with the matter. Trump's suspicions of the intelligence community have often been fueled by Nunes, who was with the president in California on Wednesday when he announced on Twitter that Grenell would become the acting director, officials said.

A spokeswoman for Nunes did not respond to requests for comment.

"Members on both sides participated, including ranking member Nunes, and heard the exact same briefing from experts across the intelligence community," a committee official said. "No special or separate briefing was provided to one side or to any single member, including the chairman."

The briefing, which was offered to all members of the committee, covered "election security and foreign interference in the run-up to the 2020 election," the committee official said.



President Trump said Wednesday that Richard Grenell, above, the U.S. ambassador to Germany and a vocal Trump loyalist, would replace Joseph Maguire as acting director of intelligence. The move was the latest in a post-impeachment purge in the administration.

Other people familiar with the briefing described it as a contentious re-litigating of a previous intelligence assessment that Russia interfered in 2016 to help Trump. Republican members asked why the Russians would want to help Trump when he has levied punishing sanctions on their country, and they challenged Pierson to back up her claim with evidence. It is unclear how she responded.

Republicans on the committee also accused some of the briefers from other agencies of being part of an effort to sabotage Trump's reelection, these people said. Schiff, for his part, said in a tweet Thursday evening: "We count on the intelligence community to inform Congress of any threat of foreign interference in our elections. If reports are true, and the president is interfering with that, he is again jeopardizing our efforts to stop foreign meddling."

Trump became angry with Maguire and told him for Pierson's remarks when the two met the next day during a special briefing for Trump on election security attended by officials from other agencies, but not Pierson.

At that briefing, Trump angrily asked Maguire why he had to learn of what Pierson had said from Nunes and not from his own aides, according to administration officials with knowledge of the meeting.

He said that Maguire should not have let the Capitol Hill briefing happen — particularly before he received the briefing — and that he should not have learned about it from a congressman, said one administration official.

Trump told Maguire and other aides in the Oval Office that he did not believe Russia was interfering to help him or planning to do so, and that the intelligence community was getting "played," according to an administration official with knowledge of the meeting. He said that the information would be used against him unfairly and that he could not believe that people were believing such a story again, reflecting his opinion that Russian interference in 2016 was a "hoax" made up by officials with a political agenda.

Maguire struck an apologetic tone and said he was looking into it, this official said.

Trump gave Maguire "a dressing-down," said another individual, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter. "That was the catalyst" that led to the sidelining of Maguire in favor of Grenell, the person said.

Maguire came away "despondent," said another individual. A spokeswoman for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence declined to comment. The White House did not comment on

Trump's Oval Office comments to Maguire.

Trump's removal of Maguire exacerbated long-standing tensions between intelligence officials and the president. Intelligence leaders have long been some of Trump's favorite targets on Twitter and at campaign rallies, where he portrays them as members of a "deep state" bent on sabotaging his reelection.

But officials at the agencies insist they have carried on the tradition of providing the president and his top aides with unvarnished information not infected by politics or policy agendas.

Grenell has no lengthy intelligence experience. His history of pro-Trump tweets and his personal relationships with Trump's children have caused current and former officials to doubt whether he could credibly serve as the country's top intelligence official, which they said Maguire did, despite having spent his career in the military.

White House officials said Trump's decision to make Grenell the acting director rather than nominate him for the permanent position reflected concerns that he might not win confirmation in the Senate, given his polarizing reputation. "The president likes acting [officials] better," one White House official said.

On Thursday, Grenell said in a tweet that the president would nominate a permanent DNI

"soon" and that it would not be him. A senior White House official said a nominee would be announced before March 11.

Late Thursday, Trump thanked Grenell "for stepping in to serve as acting DNI" in a message on Twitter. "I will be nominating a terrific candidate for the job very soon. Stay tuned!" The president told reporters aboard Air Force One that Rep. Doug Collins (R-Ga.), a staunch Trump supporter who also is running for U.S. Senate, is under consideration for the permanent post.

The president has been focused lately on officials who are allegedly loyal to him, particularly at the Justice Department, the National Security Council, the Pentagon and the State Department, aides said, and has heard from outside advisers that "real MAGA people can't get jobs in the administration," in the words of an administration official, referring to Trump's 2016 campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again."

Trump has centralized his efforts to purge the ranks of his perceived opponents. In recent weeks he pushed out Sean Doocy, the head of the White House Presidential Personnel Office, over the fierce objections of some White House aides, replacing him with John McEntee, Trump's former personal assistant. Trump has instructed McEntee, who lost his job

in 2018 over concerns about his online gambling, to install more loyalists in government positions.

Some of those removed from their jobs testified about the president's actions toward Ukraine during his impeachment hearings. Trump removed Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, as well as Vindman's twin brother, who did not testify, from their positions at the National Security Council. Alexander Vindman witnessed a phone call Trump had with Ukraine's president in which Trump pressured the leader to conduct investigations of Trump's Democratic rivals.

Trump asked for the resignation of Gordon Sondland, the ambassador to the European Union, who told House lawmakers the president had engineered a quid pro quo with Ukraine, conditioning a White House meeting with the country's president on investigations of former vice president Joe Biden and his son Hunter.

This week, Trump also asked for the resignation of John C. Rood, the official in charge of Defense Department policy, who had certified that Ukraine had met anti-corruption obligations required by law to receive U.S. aid that Trump froze.

The deputy national security adviser, Victoria Coates, has also been removed from her post after some colleagues, including trade adviser Peter Navarro, accused her of being the author of "Anonymous," a scathing account of dysfunction in the White House, according to people familiar with the matter. Coates has strenuously denied the accusation. She was moved to an advisory position in the Energy Department.

By contrast, Grenell appears to be an ideal Trump appointee. The president appreciates that he publicly bashers Germany over policy disagreements. Grenell also defends the president on Fox News and on Twitter, and when he visits the White House for meetings, Trump usually wants to see him, current and former administration officials say.

As acting DNI, Grenell will oversee the intelligence community's efforts to combat election interference and disinformation, but he has been skeptical of Russia's role in 2016.

"Russian or Russian-approved tactics like cyber warfare and campaigns of disinformation have been happening for decades," he wrote in a 2016 opinion article for Fox News, playing down the severity of the threats. That view is at odds with the conclusions of senior U.S. intelligence officials, who have said Russia's operation in 2016 was sweeping and systematic, and unlike previous Russian or Soviet efforts.

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U.S. adds sanctions on Iranian officials

Move comes as Pompeo visits Saudi air base housing U.S. troops

BY CAROL MORELLO

The Trump administration on Thursday sanctioned Iranian elections officials who disqualified thousands of moderate candidates from running in Friday's parliamentary vote, as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo toured a Saudi air base where 2,500 U.S. troops are stationed to deter Tehran.

Pompeo's visit to Iran's neighbor and biggest regional rival, coupled with the latest round of sanctions, underscored the perilous state of tensions between the United States and Iran following a U.S. drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in Iraq.

"Tomorrow, the Iranian regime will stage an event, so-called 'elections,'" said Brian Hook, the State Department's special envoy on Iran. "Unfortunately for the Iranian people, the real election took place in secret long before any ballots were even cast."

Hook said the officials — two members of Iran's Guardian Council and three members of a committee charged with vetting candidates — had denied slots to more than 7,000 women, contenders and banned 90 lawmakers from seeking reelection.

As a result, hard-liners allied with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei are expected to gain seats and embrace a more



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, center, greets Saudi Maj. Gen. Khalid al-Shablan on his arrival Thursday at Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, which houses 2,500 U.S. troops to deter Iran.

confrontational attitude toward the United States and its allies.

Hook said he doubted the next parliament would nudge Iran's leaders toward diplomacy with Washington.

"Because the day after the election, the surest leader is still going to be in charge," he said.

Hook said there will be no easing of the "maximum pressure" campaign of sanctions, which began ramping up after President Trump withdrew the United States from the 2015 nuclear deal. The State Department said the measures already have deprived Iran of 80 percent of its oil revenue and access to 90 percent of its foreign reserves, though foreign diplomats and Iran experts say the campaign has not sapped Tehran's leaders of their political and military ambitions.

Hook said the purpose of sanctioning officials unknown to most Americans is to highlight the officials who "hide in the shadow" but hold immense power and that "plenty of targets"

remain.

"And so sanctions have a practical effect, but they also have a symbolic effect, because if you don't sanction these people, it sends a message," he said. "It's a message of silence or looking the other way."

Pompeo, meanwhile, flew from Riyadh to the sprawling Prince Sultan Air Base in the Saudi desert, where he reviewed a fighter jet squadron and toured a U.S. Army Patriot missile battery defending the site. He was accompanied by John Abizaid, the U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, who previously was a four-star general and commander of the U.S. Central Command responsible for the Middle East.

Pompeo told reporters traveling with him that his visit shows the need to maintain a troop presence in Saudi Arabia after missile attacks on a Saudi oil facility and an airport last year that the administration blames on Iran.

"You need look only at the ayatollah's Twitter feed to know

that these are people who have a deep disdain for the very fundamental ideas that we hold so dear in the United States and that their desire to wipe the state of Israel off the map and to do harm to the United States of America remains unchanged."

The United States has designated Iran as the world's single largest state sponsor of terrorism. On Thursday, Hook added another descriptive epithet, calling Iran "the world's leading state sponsor of anti-Semitism."

Earlier this week, Khamenei said in a tweet that the United States is controlled by affluent Jews, and that it will sink like the Titanic.

"We are against the rule of oppression and arrogance," he wrote. "This is what we mean by 'America.' Today, the peak of arrogance is the US, which is controlled by the wealthy Zionists & their corporate owners. The US is a manifestation of oppression. Thus, they're abhorred by the world."

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U.S. accuses Russia over cyberattack on Georgia

BY DAN LAMOTHE

The United States joined several countries on Thursday in accusing Russia of a major cyberattack in the Republic of Georgia, pledging to hold the Kremlin accountable.

The Oct. 28 attack knocked thousands of government and private websites offline and interrupted television broadcasts. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the Pentagon said in statements that the Russian military intelligence agency carried out the attack. Pompeo's statement specifically blamed a Russian hacking unit known as Sandworm, tying it for the first time to the GRU.

"This action contradicts Russia's attempts to claim it is a responsible actor in cyberspace and demonstrates a continuing pattern of reckless Russian GRU cyber operations against a number of countries," Pompeo said. "These operations aim to sow division, create insecurity, and undermine democratic institutions."

Pompeo said the United States called on Russia to cease the behavior and pledged to help Georgia protect against future cyberattacks.

The Pentagon said the attack is "just one more example of how Russian malign behavior erodes transparency and predictability, undermines the rules-based international order, and violates the sovereignty of its neighbors."

"The U.S. Government position has been clear, we will defend our partners' and allies' core interests and hold the Russian Federation accountable for these destabilizing activities," said the statement, by Air Force Lt. Col. Carla Gleason, a Pentagon spokeswoman.

Neither the State Department nor the Pentagon described how they would hold Russia accountable.

John Hultquist, director of intelligence analysis at the cybersecurity firm FireEye, said it was significant that Pompeo had officially tied Sandworm hackers to GRU Unit 74455. The Justice Department has previously said that 74455 took part in the hacking of the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton's campaign in 2016.

Britain said in a separate statement that its national cybersecurity center had assessed "with the highest level of probability" that the attack was carried out by Russia and called it "part of Russia's long-running campaign of hostile and destabilizing activity against Georgia."

"The GRU's reckless and brazen campaign of cyber attacks against Georgia's sovereign and independent nation, is totally unacceptable," said British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab.

The Australian government also issued a statement condemning the "malicious cyber activity by Russia targeting the state of Georgia in October last year."

Senior Georgian officials expressed thanks for the support.

"Last October, Georgia suffered a reckless cyber attack affecting state, media & business entities," Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said in a tweet. "This was an intolerable act attempting to undermine our sovereignty. We deeply appreciate the vocal support from our partners & allies around the world."

The statements come as senior American officials express concern about the vulnerability of U.S. elections to hacking.

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